

Federal Communications Commission, §97.1 Basis and purpose.

The rules and regulations in this part are designed to provide an amateur radio service having a fundamental purpose as expressed in the following principles:

- (a) Recognition and enhancement of the value of the amateur service to the public as a voluntary noncommercial communication service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications.
- (b) Continuation and extension of the amateur's proven ability to contribute to the advancement of the radio art.
- (c) Encouragement and improvement of the amateur service through rules which provide for advancing skills in both the communication and technical phases of the art.
- (d) Expansion of the existing reservoir within the amateur radio service of trained operators, technicians, and electronics experts.
- (e) Continuation and extension of the amateur's unique ability to enhance international goodwill.

There, in a succinct 126 words, is amateur radio's reason for being, its *raison d'être*.

Now, see paragraph 47 of the FCC's recent Notice of Proposed Rule Making Order 05-235.

Conclusion

47. In summary, we believe that the public interest will be served by revising the amateur service rules to eliminate the telegraphy testing requirement. We also believe these proposed rule changes will allow amateur service licensees to better fulfill the purpose of the amateur service and will enhance the usefulness of the amateur service to the public and licensees. We therefore seek comment on these proposed rule changes. We conclude that some rule changes by some petitioners are unnecessary, or are already being considered in the ongoing Phone Band Expansion NPRM proceeding.

Now read again §97.1, especially clauses (a), (c), (d) and (e):

- (a) . . . *providing emergency communications*. What gets through with minimal gear and low power like CW?
- (c) *Expansion of the existing reservoir within the amateur radio service of trained operators* . . . Prospective amateur radio operators will no longer have to learn Morse skills to earn their license—ergo, less trained.

(d) *Encouragement and improvement of the amateur service through rules which provide for advancing skills in both the communication and technical phases of the art.* One less skill advanced.

(e) *Continuation and extension of the amateur's unique ability to enhance international goodwill.* Morse, the international language.

The Way Ahead

The end of Morse testing does not necessarily mean the end of amateur radio, nor does keeping the Morse exam assure on-air civility, a high level of good operating practices and preserves a mode that gets through when others can't. Rather, how many assaults to the body of ham radio can it withstand before it no longer resembles the service that has given so much to every amateur radio operator and to our society?

For most CW operators the end of testing will make little difference, there are sufficient "trained (Morse) operators" extant to last their lifetimes on the air. A couple of decades from now, however, and Morse may join other languages like Languedocien, Eryza and Udmurt. They're on UNESCO's list of endangered languages—will Morse end up on someone's list of endangered codes?

Similar, But Not the Same

Unlike the other elements of amateur radio testing, which require study (or, too often, memorization) sufficient to answer questions on radio theory, operating practice, rules and regulations, the Morse exam can be passed only by learning a rather exacting skill set. Though not so difficult nor time consuming as becoming fluent in a foreign tongue, a new alphabet must be learned, and the mind trained to seamlessly translate pulses (sound, light, vibration) into characters and thence words. Sending Morse well requires yet another skill set that can only be mastered through much practice.

Simply put, as long as there remains a Morse exam, operators whether they choose to use the CW mode or not, acquire a taste, a familiarity, with the form. Without that government mandated requirement it is likely only very small numbers of new amateur radio operators would put forth the effort to learn Morse. Human nature, like water, seeks the path of least resistance, and for all the rewards Morse operation delivers it takes time, patience, repetition and desire (or mandated necessity) to learn—it is not an innate human ability.

Well down the road, and with vastly diminished numbers of Morse operators occupying the traditional CW "subbands," the roar (already much more than a whisper) for more voice and (other) digital modes spectrum will easily drown out the few piping calls of Morse remaining. This assumes, of course, that a couple

of decades from now the amateur radio service still resembles something of the shape it acquired through a century of development and refinement.

Can the world and the ARS survive without a vibrant and active population of Morse speakers? Of course, but it will be a poorer and less skilled service for all that.